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### Spanningen op de arbeidsmarkt

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## SUMMARY: TENSIONS IN THE LABOUR MARKET \*

(1) In the period 1960-1965 there has existed in the Dutch labour market a general shortage of personnel in the sector of skilled and unskilled labour. This personnel shortage is, however, not only a result of the great demand for workers, but also of a shrinking supply of people for specific types of work and skill. It refers to changes which take place in the structure of the working population.

It is this structural problem which lends itself to sociological analysis, because not only the wage but a varied collection of ambitions influence the composition of the working population, ambitions which at present can be realised in many job vacancies. Considered historically a real choice of job, even for the workers, has recently become possible.

Using extensive empirical material, this study examines which sub-markets have become specific bottlenecks in the supply of personnel and how this development can be explained in a sociological and social-psychological way.

(2) The concept labour market and the study of labour mobility was formerly dealt with by the economist. First of all in the classic wage and labour market theory which presupposes that the man seeking work was a rational calculating individual, only guided in his decisions by financial motives. The theory comprises more suppositions which, in former times probably — and certainly at present —, do not conform to reality.

A full understanding of labour market behaviour cannot be obtained in this way.

The subject of the labour market was further developed by the American 'labour economists'. This group of economists tried to verify the classic theory as well as to collect labour turnover data and facts about labour supply, showing the connection between the level of wages and non-financial attractions.

This second approach comes nearer to a sociological starting point. The

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objection is, however, that most labour economists do not go further than a loose collection of facts, without incorporating them in a theoretical frame-work.

It is in this last proposition that there is a task for the sociologist, which must begin with the changed structure of jobs, the opportunities for training and the ambition of workers for a higher social status.

(3) Both in size and in composition the present employment situation in the Netherlands shows marked differences compared with the period before 1940.

Unemployment no longer exists, the opportunities for work in industry are fast expanding and, compared with the number of workers, there is a marked and fast growth of staff employees. Of interest for the recruitment of personnel in industry is the fact that, because of the rapidly increasing desire for secondary education, the unskilled workers category begins to disappear from the labour market.

The methods of production that have been developed in industry, however, still presuppose a large number of workers without training in any skill, available for the simple sub-divided work of industrial mass-production. However not only for industry but also, for example, for the mines, transport and the building industry, this structural changing threatens the continuity of personnel recruitment.

In the manner in which the working population is divided over the groups of jobs, there are at present four remarkable tendencies to be seen, namely:

- a) the classic non-competing groups which could be distinguished by social position, that is to say, by type of work, wage and social prestige, begin to disappear;
- b) the local isolation of the workers in the countryside is broken down so that they are no longer forced to accept employment locally;
- c) the recruitment in specific sections of the economy, for example employment on inland waterways (the Rhine), has long been based upon the traditional continuity of occupation (from father to son), which is now broken;
- d) given the much reduced economic constraint which the labour force experiences in the present situation, the acceptance of a job is now — much more than previously — based on the attitude-complex that the workers wish to find expression for (both in and outside of their work) and not so much on the necessity to accept any sort of work in order to earn a weekly wage.

This attitude-complex is not free from the changing and converging work situations in a technical-organizational and an institutional sense. It is this dynamic which stimulates definite role expectations connected with the make-up of the job. The continuity of personnel recruitment — particularly in the shrinking labour market for unskilled workers — will specially be threatened by that sort of work which does not satisfy those role expectations.

(4) In order to test the lines of development sketched above, the labour market of Rotterdam was chosen as an empirical subject. In former times this town had available, as a port to which tens of thousands of immigrants came, an overflow of unskilled workers. At present, however, the working population is undergoing a fast change: the number of young people who after compulsory school age do not follow further training is around 7 % for each year. In the years studied a great shortage of personnel — an average of about 13,000 men per year between 1960 and 1965 — appeared in the field of unskilled work at Rotterdam, specially in the metal and transport industries.

This shortage would have become much bigger, had it not been for the tens of thousands of commuters who daily made the journey to Rotterdam.

These commuting workers are for a great part working in heavy and dirty, or one way or another unattractive work, for which recruitment among the urban population has not yielded satisfactory results. As such the commuting groups are not only a quantitative but also a — in negative sense — qualitative addition to the labour supply of the local working population. Both in market position and in appraisal standards of work, the commuting workers differ from the Rotterdam workers.

(5) In order to get a better understanding of the appraisal standards concerned with work and wage, which are a part of the previously mentioned attitude complex, a number of facts are assembled which deal with work situations in Rotterdam and with their evaluation by the workers.

From this it appears that extreme inconvenience, or a accumulation of inconveniences, are not very evident in the present organization of work. This factual situation which for a great part in many firms has been realised, encourages expectations in those who give their labour which are against the kind of tasks involving heavy, dirty, or monotonous and isolated work. Thus a structural reduction of the labour supply is present in the unskilled sector caused by the rising educational level, whereas in the socio-psychological sphere there exists a sharpened sensitivity to inconveniences because these are not experienced by the majority of workers.

There is here, therefore, mention of a reference-process which is part of existing sociological theory.

A limited study of the standards of payment proved that the workers wanted the grade of skill to be expressed in their income. But inconveniences also and exceptional work times entitled them to extra payment. The research material, however, did not lead to the conclusion that a sufficient increase of the labour supply for unattractive types of work should result from wage regulations by themselves. The bottlenecks in personnel recruitment would not be significantly widened by such measures.

In conclusion from the empirical facts four inhibiting factors could be formulated which threaten the continuity of recruitment.

(6) In the last part of this study an attempt is made to show some limitations of the old theories about labour markets. These former considerations took too little account of the quality of the working population and the social positions of the workers. The changed composition of the working population and the increased influence of attitudes about labour market behaviour cause the firms to be dependent on the supply of particular categories of workers for unskilled or otherwise unattractive work:

- a) the commuters,
- b) urban workers who are insufficiently integrated in the culture current among working men,
- c) foreign workers.

In a society with ample work opportunities and increasing prosperity therefore, a 'pseudo-proletarian' labour market develops.

In contrast to the fixed frame-works of economic constraint and traditional occupational continuity, which formerly regulated the labour supply, there exists at present an attitude-complex which stimulates the labour market behaviour of urban workers and from which the types of work may not deviate too far lest structural labour shortages develop in the firms.

These changes in the labour market will force the firms internally to a number of technical, organizational and institutional adaptations. The results of this study are finally illustrated with a number of examples from dockwork, inland waterways and the electro-technical industry.

The whole study was rounded off with a — more or less — hypothetical job-model which promotes the integration of the demand- and supply-side of the modern labour market.